

Research Assistant Training



Tips & Tricks for Finding (Reliable) Web Content

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What we will cover



- Assessing reliability
- Finding statistics
- Tips for Internet research

Reliable sources



Evaluate sources for:

- **authority**—author is identified, reputable, credentialed
- **objectivity**—fairness, lack of bias
- **accuracy**—provides references to sources, verifiable
- **scope**—relevant to your topic and argument
- **currency**—may vary by topic, but make sure you know the current state of thinking in your field (even if it's rooted in older writings)



Finding statistics

Getting started



- First, look for news or journal articles for references to specific studies or data.
- Look for study reports, not raw data.
 - It can be useful to have access to the data, but you don't want to be in a position of having to do data analysis.

Government statistics



Government agencies gather considerable statistical data, but determining which agencies might have what you're looking for can be challenging.

A good place to start:

<https://usa.gov/statistics>



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- American Flag
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- Presidents, Vice Presidents, and First Ladies

Data and Statistics About the U.S.

Find data about the U.S., such as demographic and economic data, population, and maps. Get information about the 2020 U.S. Census.

On This Page

- [U.S. Census Data and Statistics](#)
- [Find Data and Statistics from the Government](#)
- [Maps](#)

U.S. Census Data and Statistics

The [United States Census Bureau](#) provides data about the nation's people and economy. Every 10 years, it conducts the Population and Housing Census, in which every resident in the United States is counted. The agency also gathers data through more than 100 other surveys of households and businesses every one to five years. You can explore the results of the surveys or find popular quick facts.

The 2020 Census ended in October, 2020. [Take a look back at the process.](#)

How is data from the census used?

Your responses can help determine how much funding your local community will receive for public services. Census population data is used to divide [the seats in the U.S. House of Representatives](#) among the 50 states. It can also be used to draw boundaries for state legislative and school districts.

Besides using census data for the benefit of public services, you can also use it for [genealogical research](#). To protect the privacy of people who respond to the U.S. Census, all records are kept confidential for 72 years. Find out what genealogical information is available and where you can access it.





< About the U.S.

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Find Data and Statistics from the Government

Many government agencies have statistical information on a wide range of topics. You may need to do further research to find out which agency has the information you are looking for or can help you find it.

Remember, keywords are important when doing a search. Make sure your keywords can help narrow down the search results. For example, instead of trying a search for "education statistics," try something more specific like "campus security statistics" or "graduation rates."

Federal Government Data and Statistics

These federal agency programs collect, analyze, and disseminate statistical data and information:

- [Bureau of Economic Analysis](#) collects information on economic indicators, national and international trade, accounts, and industry.
- [Bureau of Justice Statistics](#) reports on justice systems, crime, criminal offenders, and victims of crime.
- [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) measures labor market activity, working conditions, and price changes in the U.S. economy.
- [Bureau of Transportation Statistics](#) provides data on airline on-time performance, pirates at sea, transportation safety and availability, motorcycle trends, and more.
- [Census Bureau](#) is the main source of data about our nation's people and economy.
- [DAP Public Dashboard](#) provides a window into how people are interacting with the government online.
- [Data.gov](#) is the home of the U.S. Government's open data. Find federal, state, and local data, tools, and resources to conduct research, build apps, design data visualizations, and more.
- [Economic Research Service](#) informs public and private decision making on economic and policy issues related to agriculture, food, the environment, and rural development.
- [Energy Information Administration](#) provides data on U.S. use of coal, natural gas, nuclear energy, renewable energy, and more.



NGO sources



- Could include thinktanks, policy institutes, advocacy organizations, academic centers, professional organizations.
- [National Center for State Courts](#)
- [National Conference of State Legislatures](#)

Things to remember



Be aware of bias

- Read the reports critically. Do the conclusions actually follow from the data?
- Research authors/funders to find out what kind of slant they might have.

Look for counter-evidence

- Make sure you're being balanced in your approach to the research.



Internet research

Advanced Google searches



Google includes advanced search options (though they aren't obvious):

- Run a search for “Google advanced search”
- Go directly to https://www.google.com/advanced_search

Advanced Search

Find pages with...

all these words:

To do this in the search box

Type the important words: `tricolor rat terrier`

this exact word or phrase:

Put exact words in quotes: `"rat terrier"`

any of these words:

Type OR between all the words you want: `miniature OR standard`

none of these words:

Put a minus sign just before words you don't want:
`-rodent, -"Jack Russell"`

numbers ranging from:

to

Put 2 periods between the numbers and add a unit of measure:
`10..35 lb, $300..$500, 2010..2011`

Then narrow your results by...

language:

Find pages in the language you select.

region:

Find pages published in a particular region.

last update:

Find pages updated within the time you specify.

site or domain:

Search one site (like `wikipedia.org`) or limit your results to a domain like `.edu`, `.org` or `.gov`

terms appearing:

Search for terms in the whole page, page title, or web address, or links to the page you're looking for.

SafeSearch:

Tell [SafeSearch](#) whether to filter sexually explicit content.

file type:

Find pages in the format you prefer.

usage rights:

Find pages you are free to use yourself.

[Advanced Search](#)

You can also...

[Find pages that are similar to a URL](#)

Advanced Search

Find pages with...

all these words:

this exact word or phrase:

any of these words:

none of these words:

numbers ranging from:

 to

To do this in the search box

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file type:

Find pages in the format you prefer.

usage rights:

Find pages you are free to use yourself.

Advanced Search

You can also...

Find pages that are similar to a URL

About 3,620 results (0.39 seconds)

<https://www.sandiego.edu> › [dashboard](#) › [climate-impacts](#) ⋮

Climate Change & Regional Planning - University of San Diego

The **Climate Change** Sixth Assessment Report, states that the past five years (2016-2020) have been the hottest 5-year period since at least 1850.

People also ask ⋮

What is climate change short definition?

What are the mechanics of climate change?

What are 10 facts about climate change?

What are 3 facts about climate change?

[Feedback](#)

<https://www.sandiego.edu> › [sustainability](#) › [initiatives](#) ⋮

Climate - Sustainability - University of San Diego

The main goals of the Climate Collaborative are to: Address and prevent the harmful effects of **climate change**; Promote a high quality of life for the San Diego ...

<https://www.sandiego.edu> › ... ⋮

San Diego, 2050 is Calling.

Climate change threatens the iconic beaches of San Diego. A recent study by San Francisco State University economists found that, by 2050, San Diegans could ...

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Advanced Google Search



You can also use operators directly in the search bar:

site: Search within one domain or top-level

domain (i.e., edu, gov)

inurl: URL must contain the search term

filetype: Find only a particular format (i.e., pdf)

AROUND(x) Proximity search: find terms within *x* words

And many more—for a longer list, see

Internet Archive: Wayback Machine



<https://archive.org/web/>

- Preserves old versions of web sites.
- How might this be useful?
 - trying to find information from a site that no longer exists;
 - looking for a report that has been removed from a government website.



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https://

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Capture a web page as it appears now for use as a trusted citation in the future.

Only available for sites that allow crawlers.

INTERNET ARCHIVE

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WayBackMachine

sandiego.edu

Results: 50 100 500

Calendar

Collections beta

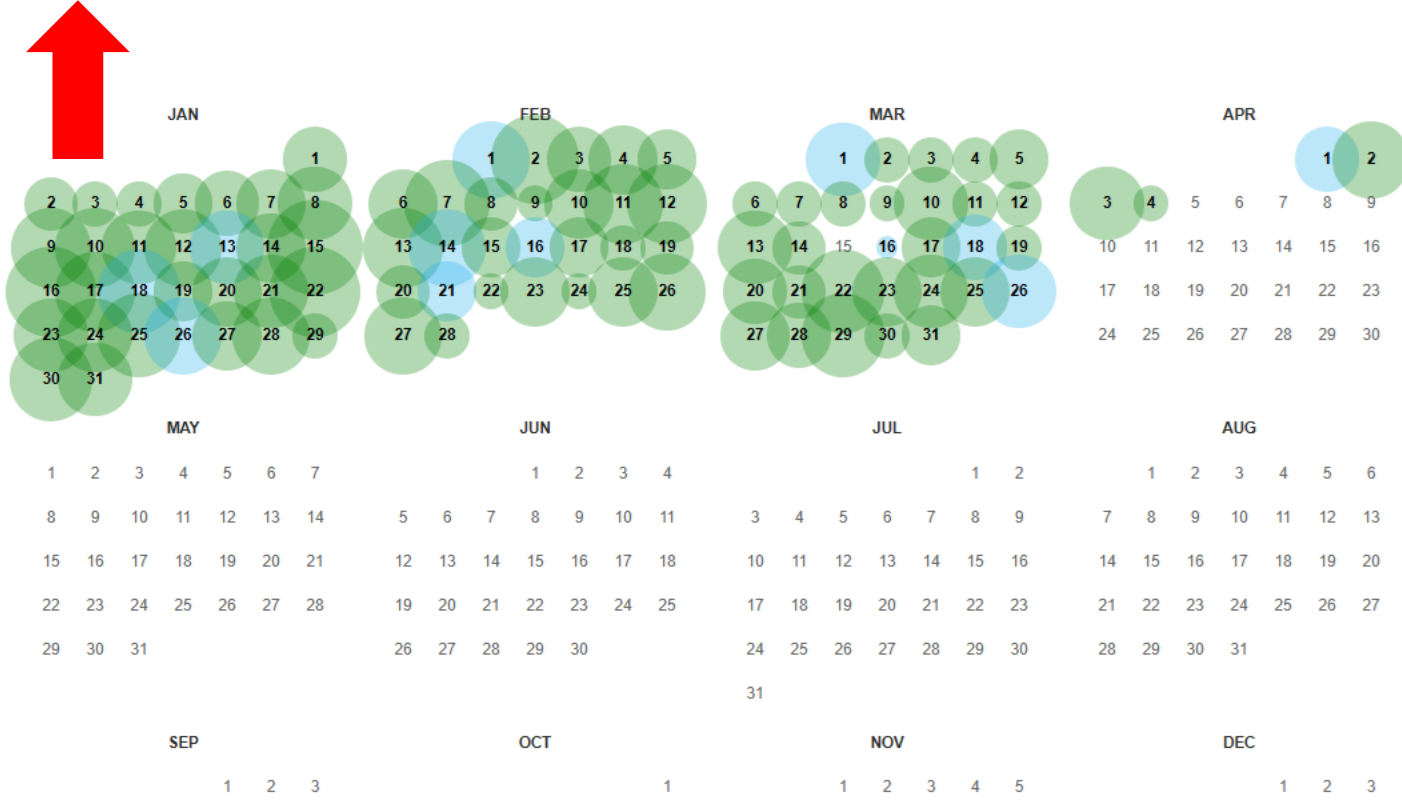
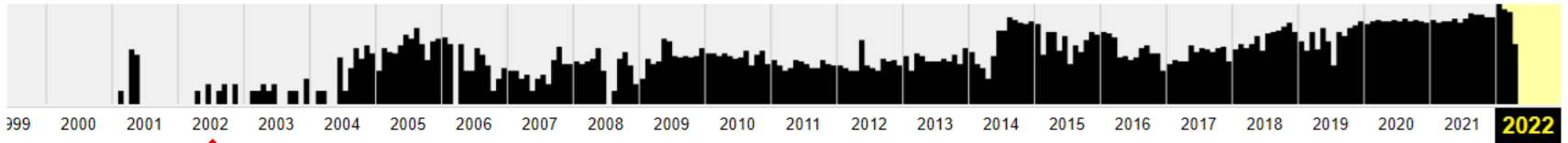
Changes beta

Summary

Site Map

URLs

Saved 7,072 times between February 2, 2001 and April 4, 2022.





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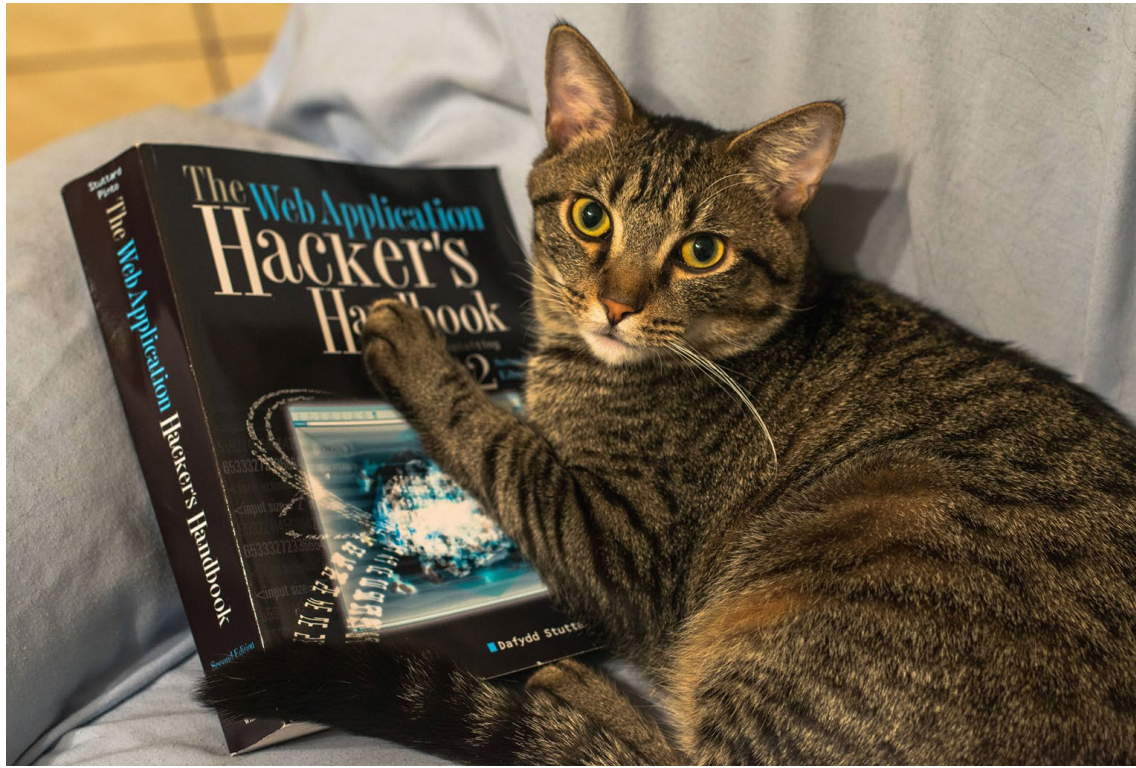
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URL parsing



URL parsing



Uniform Resource Locators (URLs) or web addresses, indicate the location of the website or document.

protocol

hostname

filename

<https://www.example.com/index.html>

Understanding how a website is organized can help you bypass a site's navigation or find orphaned pages and information.

URL parsing



Imagine that you're looking for an article by professor Floyd Neiderman from volume 20, issue 2 of *Law and Technology*. The closest you've been able to find is an article from Volume 37, issue 3 at this address:

```
http://www.uwec.edu/Admin/Journal/LawTech/2014/Vol_23/Issue_3/smithberger.pdf
```

By editing the URL, we can try and find our way to the article we want.

URL parsing



Generally, going back through the URL will lead to index pages, so this might show us an index page for all issues and articles within Volume 23:

```
http://www.uwec.edu/Admin/Journal/LawTech/2014/Vol\_23/
```

What if that fails? We can infer the organizational structure from the URL and try manipulating it to find the document we need:

```
http://www.uwec.edu/Admin/Journal/LawTech/2011/Vol\_20/Issue\_2/neiderman.pdf
```

Reference librarians are here to help!



Reference Desk

Summer hours: Monday–Friday, 9 a.m.–5 p.m.

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lrcrefer@sandiego.edu

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